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## Orthodox Medicine Humanistic Medicine Holistic Health Care

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IN THE DECEMBER 1979 issue the editors began a forum for discussing orthodox medicine, humanistic medicine and holistic health care. The response from readers has been so great that contributions to the forum no longer can be accepted. A future issue of the journal will carry a summary of the dialogue and discussion.

—MSMW

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## Holism Since Hippocrates

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ALEX WEISSKOPF, MD

THE INTRODUCTION to the special forum in the December 1979 issue of the *WESTERN JOURNAL* invites discussion of the articles on holistic medicine.

Santayana is quoted as having said "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." Thus, again, we see the wheel being reinvented. I entered these articles with relish hoping to become informed of the *new wave* in healing. Sadly, I found nothing that has not been a part of the teachings of *orthodox* medicine since prehistoric times. It does not hurt the practicing physician to be reminded of the truisms of the whole person but this is not holism, but the fundamentals of our teachings. We physicians were weaned on the concepts of humanity, love, kindness and sensitivity. Hippocrates, Maimonides, Osler and Ingelfinger, all of whom were quoted by these Holists, were orthodox physicians.

It is gratuitous for authors who are not actually taking care of patients to state "For healing . . . is as much related to one's capacity to give and to receive love as it is to the ministrations of the physician."<sup>1</sup> These articles infer, if not state, that physicians are great mechanics who tinker with

pieces of human beings, but that in Holistic medicine we find the solution as a "relatively recent [sic] manifestation consistent with this fundamental quest [for optimum health] of all humankind."<sup>2</sup>

Holism is as recent as Hippocrates and Maimonides and as original a concept as "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts," a philosophic consideration since Greek days and the basis for the 19th century Gestalt psychology.

These articles defy reason by assuming that there are areas of the environment and human behavior that are too broad and complex for the "already busy physician" and that "other health professionals should be specially trained to deal with them."<sup>3</sup>

I do hope that some future articles will clarify Holism and place it in proper context within *orthodox* medicine. The concepts of Holism are not new and, though we may not emphasize them enough, they have been part and parcel of medical practice since the first shaman beat his drum.

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## Orthodox Institutions and New Theories

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WILLIAM JAMES described the way orthodox institutions react to new theories. He said there are three stages to their development and acceptance. First, they are attacked as absurd. Then, they are admitted to be true but are thought to be obvious and insignificant. Third, they are seen to be so important that the orthodox institutions claim they discovered them.

Until very recently, holistic health was thought to be sheer quackery. Physicians scolded their patients for even thinking of trying these practices. The few physicians who began experimenting

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with holistic approaches to health were ridiculed by their peers for utilizing unproven methods. Now, as shown by some of the articles in the present forum, many physicians are beginning to recognize that holistic health concepts and practices are valuable to health care; however, they assume that these concepts and practices are so obvious that orthodox medicine today has taken what is needed from them and left behind what does not work. Further, the forum articles have assumed that physicians have been practicing holistic health for a long time and that they should maintain control over its practice.

Dwight L. Wilbur ("A Balance of Science and Art," January 1980) said orthodox medicine "has always encompassed the whole person—the psyche as well as the soma and the interrelationships of physical, emotional and psychic factors in health and disease." John R. Green ("A Pluralistic Approach," January 1980) affirmed that a pluralistic approach is needed in health care; however, he also said "all of medicine is one and physicians should play the leading role in its application."

It is difficult to believe that physicians have only taken what is valuable from the past and that physicians have long practiced holistically. Medical history is replete with examples of valuable knowledge and practices that were buried and left unused because the orthodox institutions at the time did not understand their true significance. As for our present time, it seems highly unlikely that physicians can offer whole person health care when statistics show that most doctor visits average less than ten minutes.

I am particularly concerned that some physicians are now trying to assume control over a field of practice in which they were not trained. Although one can predict this action from William James's insights, I feel it is now important to recognize how holistic health care both complements and is different from orthodox medicine.

One of the most obvious differences at present between holistic health and orthodox medicine is that many holistic health practices assume that a "life energy" (described as "chi" in acupuncture, "bioenergy" in psychic healing, "vital force" in homeopathic medicine, "prana" in yogic practices, to name a few) functions within and animates the human organism, while orthodox medicine assumes the human organism functions only as a physiochemical system. These holistic health perspectives seek to promote or maintain health by stimulating, nourishing or balancing this un-

derlying life energy. Orthodox medicine, in comparison, generally attempts to cure or prevent disease by affecting the physiochemical process of a localized disease. Although the life energy concept is foreign to most practitioners of orthodox medicine, the historical and transcultural application of it in healing,<sup>1,2</sup> as well as the present infant stage of research into subatomic energies and fields of life,<sup>3-5</sup> begins to provide the empirical basis for understanding and utilizing this mystical law of nature.

When these two approaches are each understood and respected, there is greater potential for their complementary function. The lack of understanding and respect for each approach, however, may lead to a philosophical and therapeutic conflict that fails to utilize the optimal features of each practice and diminishes their complementary potential.

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## Holistic Hype

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MEDICINE IS THE professional discipline of helping people improve their health. Modern physicians draw upon a full spectrum of resources, from ancient art to the frontiers of science, in a constantly evolving effort to help people toward that goal. There is no orthodoxy in medicine. Physicians' professional commitment to their patients requires only that the interventions they suggest are proved to be superior to the available alternatives and to have value that outweighs the associated risks.

Cultists restrict their prescriptions on the basis

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